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Creative Projects: Getting Parents Involved

Book

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CREATIVE PROJECTS GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED

As children's first teachers, parents are vital partners with schools in children's learning. The Department for Children, Schools and Families has called for closer relationships between schools and parents because such partnerships 'maximise the life chances of children'. DCSF has also said that education should be 'freer and more diverse', with more flexibility to meet individual needs. Ofsted and QCA have noted how a creative approach to the curriculum benefits children's learning and overall development.

In this publication parents and senior school staff share their thoughts about how a creative curriculum can help to achieve these aims and encourage family involvement in the life of the school.



Olivia O'Sullivan
Kimberly Safford

Foreword



Parents and families have the biggest single influence on children's lives. They are children's first and prime educators. They shape their aspirations and define their horizons.

The children of parents who show the greatest interest in their schooling make far better progress in literacy and numeracy compared to pupils whose parents do not. The involvement of fathers as well as mothers can be particularly important. This report shows that programmes like Creative Partnerships and Family Learning are effective in helping schools to engage parents, families and carers.

Children are most likely to succeed at school when they are thriving in other aspects of their lives, when the focus is not just on the pursuit of academic excellence but also on promoting a child's broader wellbeing, creativity and enjoyment. The good practice highlighted in this report is tangible and inspiring.

The programmes and projects described here prove that reaching out and communicating with parents has positive value for parents, schools and communities. But most importantly a creative approach to learning works for children and young people themselves, whether they are at nursery, primary or secondary school

We want every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and enjoy economic wellbeing - the critical outcomes that matter most to children themselves, and the outcomes which are set out in "Every Child Matters". A creative curriculum that engages children and their parents is one of the ways to achieve these goals.

Rt. Hon. Beverley Hughes MP
Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families

CREATIVE PROJECTS GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED

Creative Projects

Getting Parents Involved

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Marfleet Primary School, Hull
New City Primary School, Newham
Sandhurst Junior School, Lewisham
Seagrave Primary School, Nottingham
St Helen's Catholic Primary School, Barnsley
Stoke Newington Media Arts and Science College, Hackney
Whitstable Junior School, Kent

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www.creative-partnerships.com
and written and produced by
Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

To celebrate the completion of projects

- Hold events at school such as performances and exhibitions
- Hold events off-site at museums, galleries, universities
- Hold events at different times, such as arts afternoons, evening performances
- Organise screenings of films and DVDs
- Give children CDs / DVDs of work to take home
- Inform parents and carers through newsletters, fliers, posters, and word of mouth about events
- Serve refreshments to encourage attendance
- Publish work and report on successes in newsletters, on the website, through displays
- Collect feedback from parents – find out what they are thinking through guestbooks, comment cards, feedback sheets

Ongoing approaches

- Think about how the school looks to parents and aim to create an inviting atmosphere
- Make a flier about local libraries, museums, galleries and their programmes
- Make links with local Higher Education institutions – organise a visit for parents and children
- Make links with Family Learning to organise events, workshops and clubs for parents which reflect aspects of what children are learning
- Involve parents who have special skills such as gardening or carpentry
- Invite parents on outings to cultural centres and places of interest
- Provide transport
- Offer childcare arrangements
- Arrange for translations - oral and written where possible

Parents, schools and creative partnerships



As children's first teachers, parents are vital partners with schools in children's learning. The Department for Children, Schools and Families have

called for closer relationships between schools and parents because such partnerships 'maximise the life chances of children'. DCSF have also said that education should be 'freer and more diverse', with more flexibility to meet individual needs.

In this publication parents and senior school staff share their thoughts about how a creative, broad and balanced curriculum can help to achieve these aims and encourage family involvement in the life of the school.

Ofsted and QCA have noted how a creative approach to the curriculum benefits children's learning and overall development, and increasing numbers of schools are developing exciting collaborative projects with artists, professionals and with cultural and community centres, through national organisations such as Creative Partnerships and Family Learning as well as through local arts organisations.

Children in creative projects enjoy, learn about and develop a wide range of skills in areas such as dance, sculpture, filmmaking, writing, crafts, painting, drawing, theatre, music, architecture, storytelling, poetry, gardening, cooking, computers and animation.

Professionals such as architects, artists, film makers, dancers or storytellers come into the school to work with children and teachers and sometimes with parents. Children and families

may also visit cultural centres to experience exhibitions and performances or to show their own work. Projects may last for a term, a year, or become embedded in the school's long-term curriculum development plan; they may involve certain year groups or the whole school.

This publication draws on over 200 surveys, questionnaires and interviews with parents and senior staff in primary and secondary schools across England which are involved in Creative Partnerships and Family Learning programmes. This research was funded by Creative Partnerships and the full report is available on the Creative Partnerships website (see below).

In the research we asked parents what they thought their children were learning in creative projects. We also asked parents about their own personal learning journeys through observing and supporting their children. We asked school staff for their views on how families and communities respond to a creative curriculum.

It is our hope that what parents have shared with us will help schools make the most of parents' enthusiasm for a range of small- and large-scale creative partnerships within a broad and balanced curriculum.

Olivia O'Sullivan

Kimberly Safford

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
Creative Partnerships

A downloadable copy of the full research paper *'Their learning becomes your journey': Parents respond to children's work in creative partnerships* can be found on the Creative Partnerships website:
www.creative-partnerships.com
and on the CLPE website:
www.clpe.co.uk/researchandprojects/research.01c.htm

Why a creative curriculum?

Here are the main themes from interviews with parents:

Creativity improves home-school communication.

Children are enthusiastic about creative projects in school. They talk about the projects at home, and parents in turn become aware of what children are doing and learning. The benefits are circular: children do interesting and enjoyable work in school, they tell parents about it and parents want to find out more.

Creative projects make children happier and more enthusiastic about being in school.

Parents tell us that children 'can't wait' to get to school when they know they will be working in a creative project, and that this motivation to be in school has a knock-on effect on children's learning and achievement in other areas of the school curriculum, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Creative programmes have a significant, long-term impact on children's confidence, skills and wider learning.

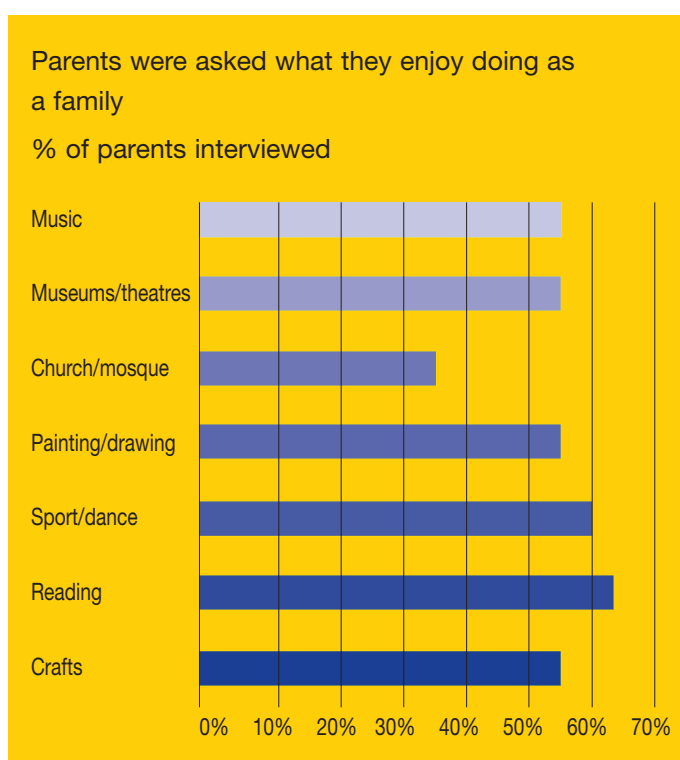
Parents see creative projects providing real-life learning opportunities linked to professional communities and creative industries, giving children models of how to collaborate, work, practise skills and develop knowledge.

A creative curriculum contributes strongly to a distinctive school ethos where children and families take pride in their school.

Parents tell us they especially appreciate projects which involve children exhibiting or performing in public spaces, bringing the school into the community. This feeling continues even when children no longer attend the school, where creative projects leave a lasting visible legacy in the form of architecture, murals, mosaics, sculptures or gardens.

Creative projects reflect families' backgrounds, interests and activities.

Parents feel confident to support children's learning in creative projects because they can often contribute their own knowledge and skills, for example in gardening, cooking, computers, crafts, art or music.



Parents are also willing to support and extend children's enthusiasms through weekend, holiday or after-school clubs and activities.

Through creative projects, parents develop views about how and where children can learn.

Parents see that children's learning can take place in many different ways: through play, movement, music, drawing, designing, crafting, doing and making; and that children's learning can take place in different locations: in school, at home, in the community, in museums, galleries, gardens, and playgrounds.

“ The projects have allowed parents – through the exhibitions and displays that show what we’re doing – to see what children are learning. They can begin to see that it’s not just sitting down and looking at books and writing. Parents are beginning to take that on board, and when they come to parents’ evenings they understand that learning involves speaking and listening and creativity as well. ”

Head teacher

“ I think the creative side of school gives them another outlook on ambition – there’s other things that they want to be. She will come home and say I want to be an actress, a fashion designer, there’s always something - and its always on the creative side rather than a mundane office job... I know that in primary school I really didn’t have an idea of what I wanted to do when I grew up. So talking about having a career, and certainly a creative career I think is just fantastic. ”

Parent

Creative projects support children as individual learners.

Parents say that creative projects give children opportunities to learn in ways that suit them best: visually, kinaesthetically and actively, and that this work helps children to identify their personal learning styles, strengths and preferences. Parents feel that children ‘can’t go wrong’ working in a creative project and therefore gain confidence in themselves as learners.

Parents say they would choose a school if they knew it had a commitment to a creative curriculum.

Parents want children to have wide learning opportunities and access to cultural knowledge and experiences which go beyond basic literacy and numeracy skills and which are not driven by tests and examinations. Parents tell us they appreciate the diversity of creative projects which go beyond a one-size-fits-all curriculum.

A creative curriculum sends a message that parents are welcome and valued by the school.

Creative projects can enhance the look and feel of the school through displays, exhibitions, performances and improvements to the indoor and outdoor environment. Children’s enthusiasm for the work encourages parents to come in to the school to see for themselves and gives parents positive contact with the school. The inviting environments developed through creative approaches to the curriculum encourage greater parental awareness and involvement which help to build the school as a community.



Parents as learners

Many school staff are aware of the barriers that some parents feel about coming into school and plan projects which involve parents as well as children.

Projects include home-school links, such as children interviewing or collecting stories from

parents and grandparents or the school inviting parents to take part in practical activities such as gardening or cooking. In some schools parental involvement in creative projects has resulted in more parent helpers volunteering in school and becoming teaching assistants or lunchtime supervisors.

“Some of our parents finished formal education at quite an early age and perhaps don’t have great memories or views about their education. So including our parents in anything that we do is quite important - but it can also be quite hard work.”

Teacher/Creative Partnerships Coordinator

“When I see my daughter playing the cello in the orchestra, I think, is it too late for me to go and learn an instrument? It prompts me to do something as well. I’ve joined the choir now. I think, maybe I could do that.”

Parent

“Some of the parents now work at dinnertime with our children. Their aspirations for their own children have really gone up. Parents are saying – my boy, he did quite well, he could get to university – now they have hopes for their children.”

Deputy Head/Creative Partnerships Coordinator



When children are involved in creative projects, parents often think about their own learning and school experiences.

Parents appreciate the kinds of learning opportunities which children have today that may be very different to their own school experiences. Most parents do not recall their own mothers or fathers ever visiting the school. Creative projects offer supportive ways for parents to find out about the school and the curriculum.



The benefits to children of work in a creative curriculum extend to families and communities.

Because creative projects often take children to cultural centres outside of school and children talk about these experiences at home, parents themselves become more aware of cultural centres in their areas such as museums, galleries, theatres and historic buildings. Children's enthusiasm can inspire parents to take advantage of learning and cultural opportunities for themselves as well as for and with their children, by taking classes, developing hobbies, taking up employment and forming adult versions of children's school experiences such as a choir, an orchestra, craft clubs and gardening groups.

“My own mother only came to school if I was sick or if there was a problem, and she certainly never knew what I was learning about in school.”

Parent

“I run a craft and card-making club now. That was something that came from school. Now I supply three shops.”

Parent

Getting ready to involve parents

Schools are aware of the importance of parental involvement, and schools responding to our questionnaires felt in many cases that Creative Partnerships projects, often alongside Family Learning programmes, provide additional ways of involving parents by raising the profile of the school with families and in the community:

- by altering the look and feel of the school through displays of children's work with professional practitioners
- through performances and projects which invite parents to come into school more often or for the first time
- through practical workshops and 'fun' days which attract parents who otherwise might be reluctant to come into school
- by inviting parents to visit cultural centres with children

Schools communicate projects to parents through displays, letters, workshops, school newsletters and websites, and make these experiences available to parents at different points:

- before projects begin
- as projects are underway
- to celebrate completion of projects



“ The softer, friendlier look of the school creates a welcoming environment for parents.”

Teacher

“ Performances in particular have raised the profile of the school... The local response to our work has been immense.”

Teacher

“ If we're doing arts projects we get a higher level of response because it's less threatening. Fewer would come in for a literacy or numeracy project. There were 40 parents for a storytelling session which was unheard of. We never usually get that kind of response.”

Head teacher

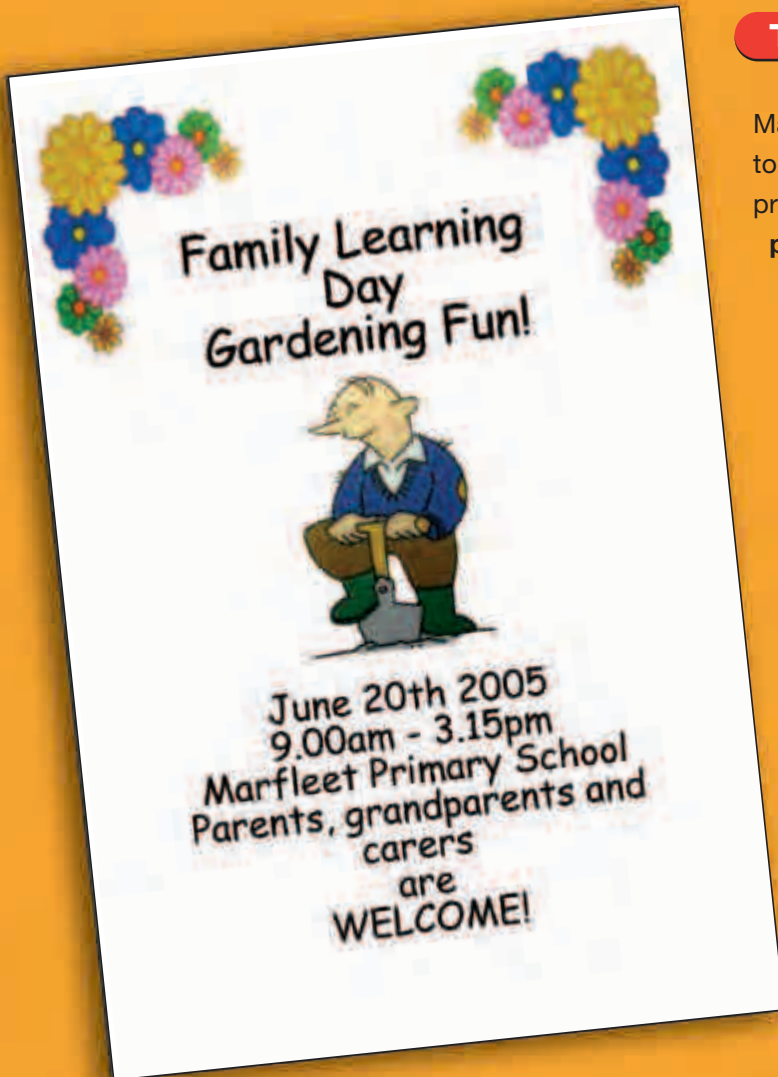
TOP TIPS

Make the most of school entrance **notice boards** to advertise projects going on in the school and to promote forthcoming events. These can include **posters and interactive displays** inviting parents to respond to planning ideas for playgrounds, gardens and classrooms.

Send **letters home** to parents giving details of new projects. Some schools translate the letters for parents who are new to English.

“Parents have a wide range of languages including Urdu and Polish. There are issues to consider with parents who have different expectations of school.”

Head teacher



Poster for gardening day produced by
Family Learning Link Worker Sandra Ransome
Marfleet Primary School, Hull

“We sent a letter to parents, translated by parent helpers. It opened up a Pandora’s Box - the good kind.”

Teacher



Getting ready to involve parents

TOP TIPS

Have **conversations** at the classroom door and in the playground; they are as important as written communications. Parents respond to **personal invitations** and encouragement from class teachers and teaching assistants, and to **'word of mouth' invitations** from other parents.

"We find out about things going on from newsletters. They're sent out very regularly. And Sandra (the Family Learning link worker) calls you over in the playground - she's always out in the playground every night and she always says what's going on. A whiteboard on wheels! We coerce people into coming as well - we say 'you'll really enjoy yourself on Friday, you'll love it!'"

Parent

"Informal conversations in the playground with parents are important in building bridges with parents who are less confident."

Head teacher

Hold informal **coffee mornings** for parents where the artist meets parents to talk about the project.

"The artist had a coffee morning for parents to explain the project. She spoke to us as a parent to parents, about her own experiences as a parent, not about specialist skills or knowledge. She said - 'anyone with a box at home can do it. You can do it'"

Parent

"Because of the coffee morning for parents, we had it firmly in our minds what this project was about. It was much more effective than any letter sent home. We learned much more from the artist than we would from a letter."

Teacher

Have a **special 'launch' assembly** to introduce a project and invite parents to participate.

"For the Talk and Textiles projects - the parents' assembly was the first time we gave parents carte blanche. We said, you're the experts, we want you to help us."

Teacher/Creative Partnerships Coordinator

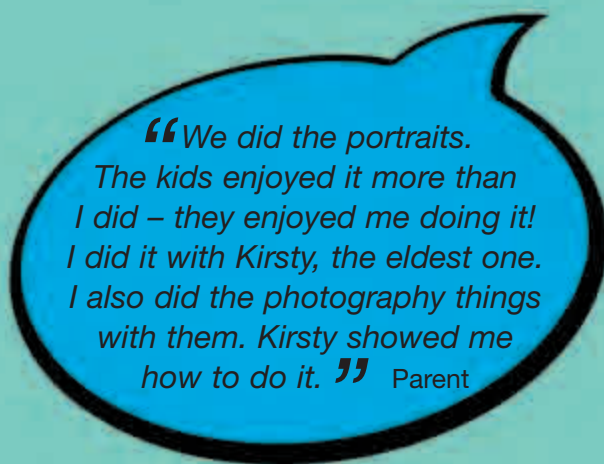
Develop a **parents' committee** for planning a particular project which involves parents as well as pupils, staff and governors.

Involving parents during projects

Once projects are underway, there are many ways to invite parents to take part and sustain their involvement.

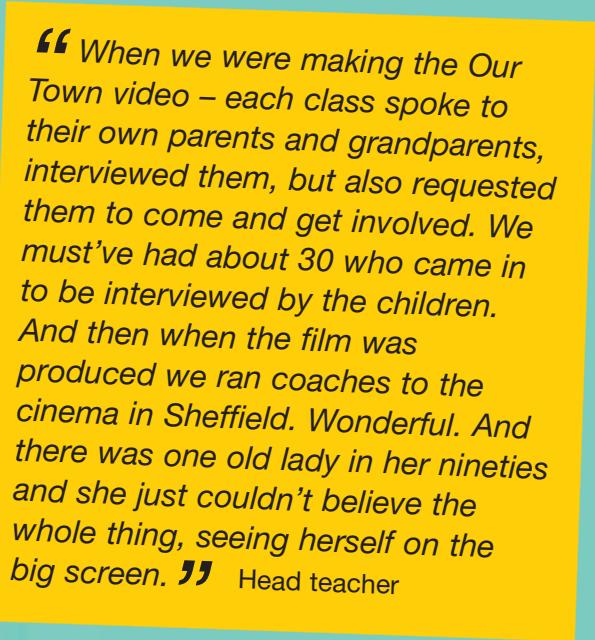
Organise **workshops and meetings** where parents can work alongside children and learn about a creative project. Children enjoy taking part in creative activities with their parents.

Plan **activity days** to which parents are invited. Often these are organised by Family Learning workers in the school and sometimes focus on creative projects funded by Creative Partnerships.



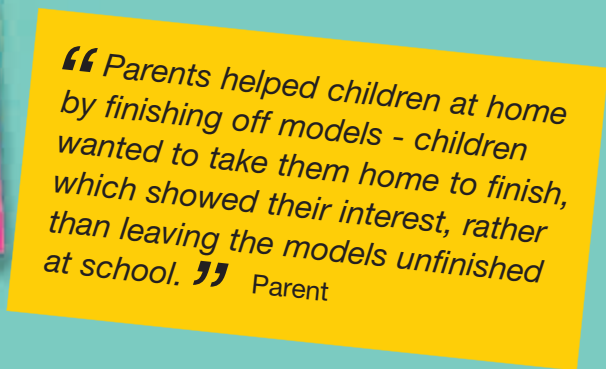
“We did the portraits. The kids enjoyed it more than I did – they enjoyed me doing it! I did it with Kirsty, the eldest one. I also did the photography things with them. Kirsty showed me how to do it.” Parent

Ask parents to help children with **interviewing** grandparents and other members of the community.



“When we were making the Our Town video – each class spoke to their own parents and grandparents, interviewed them, but also requested them to come and get involved. We must’ve had about 30 who came in to be interviewed by the children. And then when the film was produced we ran coaches to the cinema in Sheffield. Wonderful. And there was one old lady in her nineties and she just couldn’t believe the whole thing, seeing herself on the big screen.” Head teacher

Use your regular school **newsletters** to provide information about ongoing Creative Partnership and Family Learning projects and events.



“Parents helped children at home by finishing off models – children wanted to take them home to finish, which showed their interest, rather than leaving the models unfinished at school.” Parent

Completing projects and celebrating with parents

Invite parents to **performances, exhibitions and displays**. When arts partners work with children there is often a very high level of professionalism which helps parents to see their children's learning in a new light.

“ I think the opportunities you get through school are great like when they did the performance at the concert hall...It was absolutely amazing wasn't it? ” Parent

“ I cried. It was lovely. ” Parent

“ The confidence! I couldn't believe it. She bowled me over. And my husband sometimes says some of the things they get involved in, are they not too grown up? But he went to this and just ate his words. ” Parent



Display of work at Lauriston Primary School, Hackney

Hold regular **arts afternoons** for parents where the results of creative projects are presented.

Get feedback from parents by word of mouth and sometimes be letter. Increasingly schools are using **feedback sheets, guest books and questionnaires** as a way of finding out parents' responses and points of view.

Summarise and celebrate achievements using **newsletters, posters and displays**.



Display of Creative Partnerships projects at Bevois Town Primary School, Southampton

Organise **screenings of children's films and videos** in school – how about asking the local cinema to host it?

“ Seeing the children's work at the cinema was an absolute delight. Many parents and children also saw this piece of work as well as the other films that we have made this year on Class 5's “Big Screen” over the two Parent Evenings last week. ”

Head teacher

“ The current project has a website which parents can access. When the website was launched, we had a special ‘hosted’ presentation where teachers and students described the journey and development of the project and their roles in it. Parents who came were so proud. We offered a dedicated resource room where parents could access a computer to see the project from 8am-5pm. ”

Teacher/Creative Partnerships Coordinator

Produce **CDs and DVDs** to record and publish what has been achieved during projects. **Websites** are also increasingly allowing parents to access project work and materials at home.

“ There was a big display of Talk and Textiles, a display created by the artist who had very different ideas about displays than school teachers did. She used less to say more, displayed it professionally and dramatically. Parents were impressed. It reflects their experiences back to them in an unexpected way. This is what the artist can do that we can't always do. ”

Teacher



Display of children's and architects drawings at Bevois Town Primary School, Southampton

“ Well, that storytelling project, they did a video of it. I took it home to watch and Lucy and Jessica just sat there transfixed - and I was, because it was amazing. The stories were fabulous. ”

Parent



Case studies



In the following case studies parents and head teachers from five primary schools describe how creative projects make their school a special place for parents.

Creative projects offer parents a more relaxed way to visit the school. When parents come into school for enjoyment, head teachers and parents notice a number of linked positive effects which they talk about here:

Home-school communication improves.

Parents feel more comfortable in the school because they get to know school staff and routines.

Parents discover new aspects of their child and see children learning 'in action'.

Creative projects help parents learn new skills and use these skills in and out of school.

Creative projects give parents opportunities to socialise and get to know one another.

“They’re more imaginative, they’re more creative”

St Helen’s Catholic Primary School, Barnsley

*“Our arts afternoons
have been massive successes.*

*The work different classes have done
with artists from the community has been
shown together with the animations we’ve
produced...Every child in the school had
their work beautifully presented. And also
during the afternoon films were shown on
a big screen so they could see the
progression that we’ve made.”*

Philip Harrison, Head teacher

St Helen’s is a primary school with nearly 300 children in Hoyland, a former mining village near Barnsley, South Yorkshire. The school prides itself on parents’ involvement. St Helen’s has run a range of creative projects but now has developed a strong focus on media.

The headteacher Philip Harrison says parents are ‘very keen’ to be involved in events and presentations, and in seeing their children perform or exhibit. The school holds open arts afternoons where parents can come in to view children’s work.

Parents’ views of children’s learning

Parents are aware of the changes in their children’s learning – they value the different kinds of learning children experience through work in creative projects, and the possibilities such work creates.

The head teacher described one film project, ‘Our Town,’ where each class spoke to their parents and grandparents, many of whom came to school to be interviewed. When the film was produced the school ran coaches to a Sheffield cinema.

Parents have been impressed both by children’s detailed knowledge of different film-making processes and by their sheer enthusiasm.

Steven, a parent, comments: *“They’ve done different shots with cameras and basically **they’re interested in how things are done**, a shot at a time, how things come together and you see the finished thing. They were making all these models and it was so good. **Basically the talk from them spilled out like water cascading over a waterfall** – they just wanted to tell us at home. Brilliant!”*

Melanie, another parent, says: *“My children **always come home full of enthusiasm** for the next session: ‘Because I’ve been the sound man today - I’ll be the cameraman the next time.’ They’ve always spoken very highly of the people they’ve worked with. They use the first names and that breaks down the barriers.”*



Phil talks about the detailed kinds of knowledge his child has acquired: *“One of the children’s uncles works for television in Nottingham and my child was was describing for him all the different processes. This guy just couldn’t believe that **an 8 year old boy knew all the different techniques of interview** which included sound, film, music.”*

He adds: *“**I never had that kind of involvement at school and I don’t know if many other children have it.** I certainly didn’t expect it when he started that these were the kind of projects he was going to be involved in. If you want to look at journalism or anything creative – photography – it gives them a leg up.”*

Other areas of learning

Parents are aware of how the creative projects have an impact on more traditional aspects of learning.

Melanie believes learning how to interview has affected children: *“I would say **speaking with and listening to people** has improved. Getting ideas about what people think about things. On the ‘No Joy’ video they interviewed people. They expected to get a negative response when they interviewed people about the skateboard project and they got a positive one, they were surprised.”*

Phil thinks that the film work has helped work in literacy: *“I think it’s made a difference. **They’re more imaginative, they’re more creative in the work that they’re writing about.**”*

Steven adds: *“I agree. I mean my kids write plays. And they perform them, they give us all tickets and we line all the chairs round and watch them perform. **They write stories now** that you wouldn’t have got from them before. **Their imagination now runs riot.** Where before it used to be ‘I don’t know what to write about’ and ‘dad can you help’ now it’s set the imagination rolling.”*

The school has now taken the step of inviting parents to be part of a planning group for a new website that will showcase children’s creative work.



“I didn’t even know what gardening was!”

Marfleet Primary School, Hull

Marfleet Primary School is on the outskirts of Hull and has 151 children. The school has used funding and support from a variety of sources, including Creative Partnerships, to develop a garden in the school grounds which involves parents. Teacher Maureen Hulme explains:

“One of the things we’ve been able to do with some of the funding through Creative Partnerships and through our Family Link worker is to have these family learning gardening days. We’ve had several now and the parents are working with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers to realise plans for a pathway through the school grounds ... a pathway that isn’t just nature but can promote play. Children like places to sit, they like places to hide! Also, as you know Hull is very flat and one of the things the children wanted was some sort of hill. There’s an outline plan on the wall of what we want to achieve and the **parents effectively are helping us to achieve that.**”

Maureen describes what parents have done: “On the gardening days **they have weeded, cleared, pruned, built a little willow tunnel,** created a path... We’re edging the path so we can have a gravel surface which means that we could get a wheel chair up there. Parents have sawed things, cut wood, measured, made and put up bird boxes, so there has been quite a big confidence - and skills - building process.”

The family link worker Sandra Ransome, funded by Family Learning, is central in organising parental involvement: “Our Family Learning days are really good because **parents don’t feel threatened. They’re quite happy to work with their child and a group of other children ...** We’re just trying to show that **just because you’ve had a bad experience at school it’s not going to be bad now.** You’re not going to be asked to do anything that you can’t do and we always say if you don’t want to do anything, just say.”

The school invited parents to visit the Earth Centre in Doncaster (now closed). Maureen Hulme comments: “That meant that some of our families and all of our children experienced an industrial environment which had been given back to nature. And so **they were able to talk far more critically** about the things they really liked.”





Tracy comments on the family link worker's role: **"She sends out little newsletters** asking for helpers and for family learning days. Sandra calls you over in the playground, she's always out in the playground every night and she always says what's going on. A whiteboard on wheels. We coerce people into coming as well – we say 'you'll really enjoy yourself on Friday, you'll love it!' **Word of mouth is the most effective."**

Philip, another parent, talks about the work they have done: "We made a disabled ramp for the forest part. We've done bird boxes, hedgehog boxes for the small garden..." "And built a willow arch and a tunnel!" adds parent Sandra Mallington.

Sandra, the link worker, sees the benefits for children: **"I think it develops their social skills. The gardening gives them such a good basis, to actually see that when they've planted a seed they can watch it grow. For a small child, it's enthralling."**

Philip adds: **"It's teaching them skills for when they leave school as well ... It's teaching them from an early age about careers – self discipline, skills, knowledge - so when they get older, they can turn round and say, well I enjoyed doing that, so I can take it on."**

Sandra Mallington points out, **"It's all encouraging them to be physical - instead of just sitting and watching telly and doing playstation. We've learned gardening skills as well - I've learned to use a spade correctly. I didn't even know what gardening was."**

When somebody said to me garden, I thought – dream on, but I come every time."

"We went to Doncaster- the Earth Centre – a brilliant place, all about recycling. We had a fantastic day when we went there, we couldn't believe they'd closed it. The whole school went, the children adored it."



“It has definitely changed my view about what learning is about”

Seagrave Primary School, Nottingham

Seagrave Primary School is on the outskirts of Nottingham and has 442 children. Philippa Weeks, the Deputy Head and Creative Partnerships Coordinator, describes some of the school's successes in involving parents through creative projects and raising aspirations for their children:

*“ Parents got involved in the school because of a little bit of a ‘taster’ of these creative projects. Because **it can be threatening, can’t it?** As a teacher myself, when my child went to school, I had a frisson of apprehension at parents’ evening! So for someone who doesn’t have a clue about what goes on in school it must be really difficult. **Once we got parents in to help with something, they realised we were just normal people.** They wanted to help and become involved.”*

Philippa adds: “Getting parents involved can be very hard. They’re scared. When their children are doing things, that’s the way we get them involved.” She describes one occasion where parents went to a university to watch their children performing: “Parents walked in and there was a table of wine and sandwiches and they said – for us? Yes, for you! **They saw their children performing and had such pride in them.** They were gobsmacked that there was a place like that to go to, that their children were being allowed to perform in it, and that they were received with such grace. And they reacted well to it, and relations with the teachers improved enormously because of that. They felt that we had given something to their children they never knew existed.”

Tracey, a parent, describes how her daughter had the opportunity to be involved in brass tuition: “In an area like ours musical instruments were always considered posh. Or you paid for lessons. Here, they have an option of trying an instrument without forking out a lot of money to see if they like it. My daughter had never played an instrument before. She did trombone and came home and told us all about how she had to do it...She would never have tried it before. And it wasn’t something that was easy to get the chance to do and it wasn’t easy to do, she was quite scared in the beginning. But once she tried it, she thought, ‘I’ve learned something new, I’ve tried and I can do it, I can try’. From listening to her she now feels – ‘oh that’s good, I can try, I can do it.’”





Giving new skills and learning experiences is valuable. She'll take it though life. Now **she has some experience of enjoyment, rather than thinking 'oh that's not for me'.** It's had an ongoing effect."

Linda, a parent comments: "The sensory garden was important for Hannah. We couldn't use our own garden, it was vandalised all the time. She has always loved gardening. It was a whole year when everything she made or grew for the garden was smashed and broken. She would make things and bring them to the school garden. **Every single child had a hand in it, whether it was putting a brick down or planting something.** And the next year we won the City in Bloom award."

Linda believes that creative projects allow more children to feel successful: "If a child can express themselves through dance, music, drama, yoga or art - they are all ways of getting out their emotions. **They can all excel in something, even if it's not academic.**"

Tracey sums up how her ideas about learning have developed: "**It has definitely changed my view of what learning is about for children.** It's fun! They don't realise they are learning at the time. **I think through play they learn so much.** I look at them when they are doing these things, they are learning so much. They've enjoyed their day."

Jackie, another parent, feels the same way: "It shouldn't just be about sitting them at a desk, and the teacher talking at them and they've got to write notes and answer questions. **Learning comes through play, through art, through watching other people, through doing things at home and at school.** It should involve all sorts of things that help a child's learning...We all have different styles of learning, don't we? You can't say what works for one child will work for the next child. There are many ways, enjoyable ways, of learning."

“ The important thing is doing it ”

Jessons Primary School, Dudley

Jessons Primary School in Dudley is a three form entry school with 600 pupils. Headteacher Lucy Griffiths says the school has a strong ethos of promoting children's education through active participation in the arts and involving parents in this approach to learning:

*“ I've got a strong vision about school being about more than English and Maths. Our vision for education is the social, moral and spiritual education of the whole child. The broad education is so valuable for kids here. **It makes education so much more interesting, doesn't it? The important thing is doing it.** ”*

Lucy Griffiths, Head teacher

Parents Michelle and Sarah got involved in the craft club and now they go on their own, without their children. Sarah says it's a good way for parents to get to know one another:

*“ You start meeting people. It's nice for the socialising and the crafts. I didn't know anyone, but I went along, and then **you make friends, and you can say 'I've been, it's good, come along'.** Then others come, and it's a good way to **meet and make new friends.** ”*

Sarah, parent

The school has a 'Learning Link' worker who organises a wide range of workshops for parents and children together, and for parents on their own during the school day:

*“ She ran craft sessions for parents and children in the holidays. We did a summer school for parents and children. It's about involving parents in their children's education. We do get them in to do English and Maths as well, but we get them in increasing numbers for arty things. **You've got to have parents really trusting you for them to come in.** ”*

Lucy Griffiths, Head teacher

Michelle says parents feel more confident about doing arts and crafts with their children, but they also enjoy learning new skills for themselves:

*“ **It's nice to learn something new that you can pass on to the children.** We made gift boxes, embossing, we did cards, then we went on to paper folding. I had never done anything like it before. People get offended now if I send them an ordinary card! They say, where's my handmade card? **It's infectious!** ”*

Michelle, parent

Sarah says children are happy when they see parents in school, and that being in school makes parents more aware of what children are doing and learning:

“ The children love it when you’re in school. If you know how things run, and you know the staff, you tend to help out and know what goes on. Then you can talk at home about what goes on in school and share things together. It’s really nice. Now I really look forward to my morning in school ”
Sarah, parent



Michelle says the Learning Link worker plays an important part by **encouraging parents to talk about what kinds of activities they would like to do** in school clubs or workshops:



“ The link worker is fantastic. She will ask what we would like to do. She’ll put up posters, get us to bring friends and tell mates. She sent us a sheet, with a list of 30 or 40 different things we could do. There was dress-making, English as a second language, computers, healthy eating, researching your family tree, and you could tick what you would like to do. Everyone wanted crafts and no one wanted healthy eating!! ”

Michelle, parent

“ If we get to the parents, we get to the children ”

New City Primary School, London

Jackie Withnall is Head teacher of New City primary, a school with 573 pupils in inner London. She says a creative curriculum should extend beyond children to parents and the community:

“ I would like to be able to **offer parents creative experiences just for them.** With the agenda for extended schools, we could offer early evening classes particularly around helping your child to be creative, things you could do with your child for free around London. If we get to the parents, we get to the children as well. You get to the children through a slightly different route. **Parents are children's first teachers, aren't they? ”**

Jackie Withnall, Head teacher

New City offers parents opportunities to experience what children learn in creative partnerships:

“ We formed an adult choir. The adult choir was **open to all members of the community,** so we had **parents, grandparents, support staff involved** there. We've sung a lot in the community. It's **built good relationships between the school and the community.** It gave parents and members of the community and staff a lot of confidence and a role in the community. We had some people who came along who were quite lacking in confidence. Now they're singing in front of an audience.”

Jackie Withnall, Head teacher

Parents at New City believe the creative curriculum has had a positive impact across the school:

“ It makes a difference to the children. I believe the behaviour in this school is as good as it is because of the projects and everything that goes on. I really do believe that. It tells the children they are special. It shows an interest in the children. They may have whatever going on at home, but when they are here they are motivated and challenged, and they enjoy it. They are all learning, starting something new all together so no one is better than another, they are all equal, they all have a chance to shine. ”

Parent



Tracey is a parent at New City primary. She says that when the children's school orchestra performed at the Barbican Centre it made a big impression on parents:

“ I had never been there before. **It was an opportunity for us** as well. I had seen pictures on the telly. It was my first time there. Now I see pictures on the telly and I say – I've sat there! **”**

Tracey, parent



Debbie, another parent, agrees that one of the biggest impacts of creative projects is when children and parents visit music centres, museums and galleries. She says that when parents see how their children develop through creative programmes, it prompts parents to think about their own learning and growth:



“ When I see my daughter playing the cello in the orchestra, I think, is it too late for me to go and learn an instrument? **It prompts me to do something** as well. I've joined the choir now. I think, maybe **I could do that.** I went with my daughter to the Tate. I had never been there before, never been to an art gallery, and I thought, this is brilliant. Why am I so interested now? It might have changed my life. Maybe I would have gone to university. **”**

Debbie, parent

Involving parents in creative projects

A checklist for schools

Planning and preparing for projects

- Think about the range of projects you are planning. Are there any projects which might involve parents
- Review your project timeline and decide how parents could be involved at different points along the way
- Brainstorm how you can advertise the project to parents through fliers, posters, newsletters, the school noticeboard, a special display, the school website
- Send letters home – translating them if possible into community languages
- Don't forget word of mouth – as parents collect and drop off their children and talking to parents in the playground
- Ask parents to tell other parents
- Hold a special launch assembly, coffee morning or workshop where parents can learn about the project

As projects are underway

- Hold workshops for parents - look for times when parents are already in school
- Hold activity days, sharing sessions or fun afternoons linked to the project
- Ask parents to help children carry on work at home: build-in home-school links such as interviewing family members or telling stories
- Encourage children to talk about projects at home
- Inform parents how projects are going in newsletters, through displays and on the school website